



i Magazine

(the student literary magazine of mt. wachusett community college, gardner, mass.) vol. 9, no. 1, spring 1979

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GROUCHO

Over the years I found myself in total awe of his incredible talents. Because of these talents, I changed from a normal, appreciative member of his audience, into an idolizing, mimicking admirer. I have never known a greater ad lib performer, or a funnier, quick-witted comedian than Groucho Marx. Through his eye-catching wardrobe and his razor-sharp mind, this man comes to the minds of many when they hear the word "comedy." While on stage, he would don a colorful costume of black and white. It seemed almost as if he believed man would never create the color television. He wore a long-tailed black tuxedo with baggy pants, scarcely held on by a thin black leather belt. His white collared shirt was as baggy as his pants, seemingly held in place by a thin flat-edge necktie, then the height of fashion. A pair of bright white socks constantly disagreed with his rarely shined black shoes beneath them, and the black pants above them.

Whether they were for show, or because he truly needed them to see, Groucho always wore a pair of round wire-rimmed glasses centered below two large artificial eyebrows (used as "laugh getters" to emphasize his popular double entendres) and above an

equally large, equally artificial mustache (used as a disguise to avoid public recognition). You see, Julius (Groucho) Marx needed his majestic face to go unnoticed in public so he could continue his insanities off the stage as well. Once, he went to see the great Houdini performing his mystical feats of magic. The magician was about to perform the trick where he first places several needles in his mouth, then a piece of thread, and removes the thread with every needle strung upon it. He asked for a volunteer from the audience to "check the props," as it were. Now Groucho, being the Sherlock Holmes of comedy when detecting a good straight man, was out of his seat before the master had finished his words. He ascended the stage stairway, and walked up to the performer. Houdini asked the volunteer if he was any part of the act, in order to reassure his audience he was not a fraud. Groucho replied he was not. With a smile of relief, the magician asked him to look into his mouth, and see if he saw anything. Groucho looked in as Houdini dropped open his mouth. "Pyorrhea," said Groucho, and he turned and walked off the stage.

His talents were as overwhelming to me as they were to his son, Arthur Marx. Arthur wrote a book about his father entitled Life With Groucho. In it he states that his father had the uncanny ability right at the sput of the moment to think of the "come-back" you and I think of two or three days later. An example of this was when Groucho, who was Jewish, was visiting a Christian Health Spa. The manager apologetically explained that since Groucho was a Jew, rules forbade him to be able to use the pool. Without the slightest concern about their prejudiced policies, he kindly asked the manager if it would be all right if his daughter, who is only half-Jewish, could go in up to her knees.

Hundreds of similar stories have been told about this great comic, and there are probably thousands more which have never even been publicized.

When the Marx brothers performed together, the insanity was even greater. His brother, Chico, portrayed the piano player with the corny Italian accent. He was the only character in the films that ever gave Groucho any verbal competition. Harpo Marx, on the other hand, played the role of the mute harpist, whose zaniness was seen through the slapstick actions he utilized, and the many hilarious faces he wore. His compliment to Groucho's talent was to allow Groucho to recite a soliloquy, without having to be on the stage alone. The fourth brother, Zeppo, played the role of the straight man. His tiny flare for comedy died when compared to the natural abilities of his brothers. Out of all these characters, however, Margaret Dumont was the best thing that ever happened to any Marx Brothers films. This actress played the gullible rich widow so often that she undoubtedly believed it to be her real life-style. And Groucho, constantly ad libbing his characters, often succeeded in presenting Margaret as the gullible woman she portrayed. In one picture, Groucho (playing the role of Otis Driftwood) is boarding a steamship with Ms. Dumont, luggage and all. She turns and asks, "Otis, do you have everything?" "I've never had any complaints yet!" confesses Otis. Her innocent expression revealed her inability to understand what Groucho meant. She again fell ignorant to Groucho's quick wit when, during a scene from Duck Soup they were inside an old bomb shelter surrounded by a raging battle. Groucho stood in front of Margaret, his arms outstretched like a cross. "What are you doing?" she exclaimed. "I'm defending your

honor--which is more than you ever did!"

It was from all these anecdotes I knew him to be the comic genius he was, but ironically, his last few months of life were anything but spectacular.

Many years later, when Groucho was nearing eighty years of age, he was being cared for by a Ms. Erin Fleming. With all his brothers dead, she would escort him to selected social events, smiling radiantly in front of the one-eyed cameras. But then the cameras would go away, and with them, her charm. The caring and loving would turn into greed for the old man's wealth. She never cared about the wealth he had created through his humor, and she never once thought of him as a mighty social giant--until she was caught. Arthur Marx revealed to a surprised public that the charming Erin Fleming had been mentally abusing Groucho by increasing his dosage of pills, thus creating a frightened state in an already unstable mind. The injustice of it all is evident by the fact that Ms. Fleming broke the law. In my mind, however, the injustice lies in the fact that this great comic was unable to leave this life as naturally and majestically as he exited from the stage so many times throughout his career. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Groucho Marx.

sara j. whitcomb

IN THE HOME OF WASHING MACHINES

Square-faced old woman,
in your big-buttoned navy overcoat you
drag plastic bins across a tiled floor.
Daintily pull dimes from a coin purse.
I know you will choose only gentle cycles.
Your husband sits like a mimeographed resume,
on a straight-backed green couch.
He waits to help fold blankets and sheets--
he waits for wrinkles and winter.
And the solemn matron pulls outdated business cards
from the laundromat bulletin board
as a Driekorn's truck rolls silently by.

anonymous

FILBERT'S FABLES

When Fred Filbert had joined the navy in 1951, it was to escape the boredom of Buxbridge, Maryland. His father couldn't understand why Fred wanted to leave the serene, little fishing community and bashful Fred didn't have the heart to tell him that, in his soul, he knew that he was meant for a life of adventure. The army books he had read filled him with a driving lust for that untamed existence that eluded him in Buxbridge.

So Fred left behind the salt and the scales and was flown off, to boot camp 3,000 miles away to San Diego, California. This was about the time that people were just beginning to realize that there was a good possibility of United States participation in a conflict with a divided Korea, so the plane was overcrowded with hundreds of potential reservists. Fred was eagerly awaiting his first takeoff and the exhilarating view that would be afforded him at 10,000 feet. But the plane was so overcrowded that unfortunate Freddy was forced to spend the entire flight in the windowless baggage room. A bout, which Fred lost decidedly, against airsickness followed.

Upon his arrival in bootcamp, the sadistic drill-instructors began to prey immediately on his slightly paunchy body, and he was screamed at with more decibels and closer to the ear than most recruits. It seemed Sargent Plassa was to fat what Hitler was to Jews and the officer spent a lot of time trying to exterminate Fred.

It also seemed that the other recruits decided to pick up on Sargent Plassa's dislike of portliness, because at every opportunity, they would frame Fred into looking like the one responsible for violations they themselves had made. Some of the more imaginative punishments Sargent Plassa concocted for Fred were the alternation of torridly hot and frigidly cold buckets of water being dumped over his head, peeling fourteen gross of potatoes with a double-edged razor blade and, the most creative of all, cleaning the outside of the barracks building with the eraser end of a pencil. The generous and sympathetic Plassa allowed him two pencils.

"I'm not really enjoying boot camp, very much, I don't think," Fred confided one morning to the Chaplain. "At least, not as much as the other fellers are. But still, it's better than Buxbridge. You know, in Buxbridge, it's so boring that. . . ."

"Look, you obese pile of shit," the Chaplain interrupted, "Your hometown is the last thing I want to hear about." With that the father spun around and walked up the stairs into the officers' club to shoot some pool.

One of the most dreaded parts of boot camp life was opening letters from home, at least for Fred. Oh, he received plenty of letters, alright; it was just that the news he received made him wish that he was back in Buxbridge. His mother's letters contained news of Stupendous Pictures shooting a thirty million dollar production titled Buxbridge Bay, starring his life-long fantasy, Cynthia Southern, and boyhood idol, Gordon Wheelright. The place was crawling with movie people and many of Buxbridge's own residents were being paid for being extras in the shooting. In the next letter she wrote of the discovery of a long-lost Spanish galleon only fifteen miles outside of Buxbridge Bay and the flow of journalists and scientists had made life in the town even more exciting. His father had just won 10,000 dollars on a radio quiz show and had purchased a new Corvette. She said that life had become so hectic in the

little fishing community, with all the movie and newspaper people, that they were debating a move to another village.

"Gosh, durn," Fred had cursed to himself. "The 'citement in life seems to be passin' me by no matter what I do." That logic was hard to argue with. As fate seems fit to tease, Fred was stationed for the remaining two years of his enlistment in the thriving metropolis of Boise, Idaho. By the time he returned home, he knew everything about the potato that there was to know.

Upon his return home, however, Fred wished that he hadn't stopped reading the letters from home after the news about his father winning a Corvette, because he soon learned that the old man was killed in that same Corvette later that same week. The movie people had long since moved on, and the so-called Spanish Galleon had been found to be a re-creation made in America for the 1876 centennial celebration.

"Yes, it's all true, son," his mother explained, still annoyed that her letters were unanswered. "your sister now lives in New York married to a big newspaper man, and your brother's in California, married to Cindy."

"Wait a minute, man, you're talkin' too fast. Are you tryin' to tell me Herbie found a girl? Who is she?"

"Well, if you'd a been readin' my letters like a good son, you'd know that it wasn't just any girl, it was Cynthia Southern."

Fred pointed at his mother, turned a chalky white and opened his mouth and eyes so wide that he looked like a white bowling ball with extra-large fingerholes. His mouth was open, but all that came out was a Ralph Cramden "Homina--hummina--hum..." He was glad that he couldn't speak, because all he could've said was, "Gosh, durn," and he was forbidden to swear in front of his mother.

When Fred was fully recovered from the shock of his dream lover being married to his younger brother, his mother told him the news of his father's will, that gave him sole possession of the fishing vessel from which his daddy made the family's living. But as the luck of fish-crossed Freddy would have it, there was a provision. Fred was instructed to marry the girl his parents had been trying to set him up with since puberty. Fred would have no objections to this, except that he would have preferred to marry something that even slightly resembled a female homosapien. Fred and Gloria "Gill-Neck" Wilson were married within a week. Disillusioned and now fatalistic, Fred began his unwanted career as a fisherman.

Fred's existence consisted of nets and fish all day, and an eyes-closed-in-horror welcome home cheek peck from Gloria, a plate of something she referred to as supper, and sleeping in separate beds. Fred could not bring himself to make love to Gloria, for he feared that he might be responsible for perpetuating the Gill-Neck Species.

For eleven years he sailed and fished, fished and sailed and sometimes he could fish, sail and fish to break up the old humdrum routine. Of course, he did read. After the first three weeks on the job, Fred found that even he needed something to help break up the monotony. He devoured book after book, concentrating mainly on classics and adventure, and avoiding Marine and Army stories. The sun tanned his balding scalp day after day as he escaped from the sea-gulls and seaweed into the worlds of H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Ian Fleming, R. L. Stevenson and others.

Things got so that Fred became so obsessed with his reading that he spent less and less time fishing, and Gloria was growing nervous. The electricity was shut off, like the heat and telephone before it. She told Fred the neighbors were all talking about him, and that something must be done to supplement her sixty dollars a week from her part-time job. "Why don't you run home to mother?" Fred bellowed

back, the first time he had spoken in days.

"You know mother's dead," she sobbed, screamed, astonished at the stark cruelty of Fred's question.

"Yeah," Fred said, "And she probably went to hell. So why don't you run home to her?" Having the urge to murder Gill-Neck, Fred stormed out to the peaceful seas and his books.

He was just finishing his third book of the week, The Three Musketeers by Dumas, when the hot sun forced him to retreat back into the cabin of the boat. His head pulsed painfully, his brain feeling more like a heart. A thought struck him, suddenly. There was one easy way out of the boring hole he had been buried in. He had spent a boring life on the Atlantic Ocean so why not a boring death, too? Without another thought, Fred walked blankly from the cabin and prepared to leap off the boat.

A thrashing noise halted Fred from making his bellyflop into the next world. He looked down toward the net, where he saw to his natural surprise, a mermaid. Fred never questioned what he saw, because ever since his brother ran away with Cynthia Southern, he believed just about anything.

"Oh please, do not harm me," she began to plead at the first sight of Fred. She struggled to free herself.

A sly smile came over Fred's face, an unfamiliar position for his mouth. "Why, my dear, my dear, that's the last thing I have in mind, believe me. Here, let me untangle you."

"Catch anything today, dear?" Gill-Neck was making some tuna casserole without the tuna.

"Oh, I, ah, I caught something, I guess you could say that, yeah," Fred smiled. How would he break the news to her? Tomorrow he would set sail to Paris on his new yacht, where he would manage the most successful night club in Europe. At least that's what the mermaid had promised, and they didn't lie, did they?

While enjoying his fishless meal, there was a knock at the front door. "Who could that be?" mumbled Gill-Neck.

Cracking the door open, Fred saw, eye patch and all, Captain Long John Silver, with a dead parrot on his shoulder. Shaking his hook hand at Fred, he snarled, "Take me mermaid away, will ya? Yer Swab!!"

Immediately locking the door, Fred raced for the rear exit.

"Who is it?" asked a perplexed Gill-Neck.

Fred paused for a moment. Would Long John harm her? No, not even a pirate would have the stomach to touch Gill-Neck.

Charging out the back door, pistol in hand, Fred was accosted by three more pirates. Three shots later, they all lay on the ground barely breathing. "Ha, ha!" Fred triumphantly snarled as he bolted into his specially-equipped Ferrari, tires screaming as the charging machine blasted out of the driveway. Now this was the life for Fred.

Pressing the oil slick button on his dash, Fred lost Goldfinger's henchmen. Laughing, he lit up a cigarette at 120 miles per hour, not thinking that he didn't smoke. Finally running out of gas, Fred made for the nearby forest to hide, to ambush his pursuers.

"There he is, the varlet." It was Artemus, urging Dartanian to follow him. Why did they chase Fred? Had they some alliance with Captain Silver? In any case, his respect and admiration for them was now secondary to his own survival. Monsieur Filbert withdrew his sword and prepared to duel with the two musketeers.

"You have come to take me? he questioned Artemis.

"I have," roared the massive musketeer.

"Then have at it." After only a few seconds, Fred realized that he couldn't possibly keep up with expert swordsmen. He would need help.

He was wounded slightly by an Artemian thrust when he heard the Apeman's familiar call. In another moment he was swept up in the arms of the jungle legend, who landed him safely on the top branches of a very secure tree.

"Thank you, old friend," Fred shook the hand of his rescuer.

"Tarzan glad to give help to Fred." In a moment the apeman had vanished among the branches. Fred looked down. It must have been hundreds of feet to the ground. How had he gotten to the top of the Empire State Building, anyway? Could he have forgotten? He looked up and saw the huge ape who was now fighting off the planes. The police were trying to evacuate the thousands from the streets below. They had crowded around the building to witness the expected death of Kong.

Fred slowly climbed down to a safe ledge and edged his way into a window. He had to get fresh water for that man, lest he die; thanks to the cruelty of Captain Bligh. Careful not to spill any of the precious liquid, Fred eased the cup to the dying man's parched lips and urged him to drink. Then he heard Bligh's voice. "What are you doing, Mr. Filbert?"

"I'm giving this man fresh water to wash out his digestive system, sir. He's just consumed too much sea water and seems likely to die."

"I gave no such authorization," return the water to its bin."

"Why you bloody pig!" first mate Filbert hurled the watering cup at his captin.

"Well, Mr. Filbert," Bligh's mean eyes burned into Fred's, "That was a very costly loss of temper. I can hardly wait to see your court martial."

The next Fred remembered was waking up in prison. At least those were his first impressions. Before too long a large, bulky man came to the cell opening. "Are you well enough to walk?"

"As well as I'll ever be, I suppose," Fred answered.

The cell was opened and Fred was led through a futuristic world of flashing lights and automatic doors. "Where am I, on a rocket ship?"

Submarine," was the grunted reply. He was led through three more sets of doors that opened automatically. Finally they approached what Fred took to be the captain's chamber. He was right.

"Hello, I'm Captain Nemo." The strange looking man offered his hand, but Fred sensed immediate danger. He rendered the guard helpless with a vicious boot to the abdomen, and ran from the chamber.

"Stop him," he heard Nemo yell to someone.

Fred knew those Karate lessons would pay off someday. While coasting down the sub's hallway, he realized that Nemo must have rammed the Bounty! As fast as he was running, it was not fast enough to escape the network of guards. They were catching up when an unseen hand from a chamber Fred was running by yanked him inside. "I'm here to help you," a voice assured him. The chamber was dark, and Fred saw nothing.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Why of course, forgive me. I'm Dr. Tom Griffin, the discoverer of the secret of invisibility. Here, drink this."

Fred felt a beaker being pushed against his lips, but remembering something about invisibility eventually causing madness, he brushed Griffin away. "No thanks," he said.

"Why you ungrateful fool. Can't you see that I'm..."

"Ah, shattup." Fred fled the chamber, but ran right into a group of potential captors. He fought them off for a while, but was greatly outnumbered and his task proved impossible. He was rendered unconscious.

He awoke to find himself in a dry, dark cell with a gravel floor and stone wall. He glanced up at the old man sleeping on a shelf next to him. Suddenly Fred felt very comfortable. He knew that soon, the old man would give him a map to a treasure hidden in a cave, and soon would take out revenge on those who had imprisoned him in the new identity as the Count of Monte Buxbridge.

"It makes no sense, no sense at all," muttered detective Sgt. Lyons. "Here's a guy, never harms a hair on anyone's head in his whole life, gets a sudden small touch of sunstroke, and goes beserk." Lyons looked deferentially at his boss, Chief of Detectives, Alice Morgan.

"Give me the full rundown on exactly what Mr. Filbert did again, Sargent."

"Certainly, sir." Withdrawing a few papers from a folder he had been holding, he began to skim the important details from a report.

"Subject's name is Frederick Swanson Filbert, a fisherman by trade, 200 pounds, 5'10" tall, aged 35, married. Officer Silver was about to question subject about a homicide that had occurred earlier in the day when a young girl that had been out sunbathing on a raft was stabbed approximately at 4:30 that afternoon. Approximately 6:38, Officer Silver reports that subject yelled, "She's my mermaid," and slammed the door. Then, subject bolted door and retreated through the back, where, as a precautionary measure, three officers were situated. He withdrew a 38 caliber pistol and shot and wounded three officers. Subject left scene in his truck heading south on route 44. Officer Silver was unable to continue pursuit of subject when an oil truck jackknifed, avoiding Mr. Filbert who was driving recklessly.

"He ran out of gas in downtown Baltimore. Here's an unbelievable part; two officers had been chasing Filbert, one wounding him in the abdomen, when a construction crane swooped down and scooped subject up, placing him safe and sound three stories above on top of the Hertz office building. The guy just had luck on his side or we would have stopped him...before," the excited Sargent's voice trailed off sadly.

Chief Morgan puffed at her cigarette and stared at Lyons. "Continue, Sargent, continue."

"Yes, sir. Police surrounded the building, evacuating the area. Subject was captured, and asked for a drink of water. When his request was refused, he began kicking and punching and calling the attending officers bloody pigs. Officers reported that the strength he exhibited was incredible."

His boss interrupted him. "Isn't it true, Sargent, that when someone goes mad, they may produce an overabundant amount of adrenalin causing them to perform superhuman feats?"

"Yes, sir, I believe so." Lyons wondered why his superior was getting so perturbed. Maybe because he was calling her sir. Of course! Lyons could have hit himself but that would have looked stupid. "Subject was imprisoned in cell at sixth precinct. While being

transferred to another room for questioning, he seemed relatively passive, but when Captain Verne introduced himself, Mr. Filbert used the same incredible strength and incapacitated the four attending officers. He then ran down a hallway, finding a storeroom to hide in for a moment but was then apprehended and knocked unconscious." He looked into the lieutenant's piercing gaze, "That's about all I've got."

The chief detective's large and very attractive brown eyes glared sensually at Lyons. "That's all very interesting, Reggie. May I call you Reggie?"

"Yes, sir--ma'am, that is."

She snickered, putting her cigarette out in her desk's ashtray, "but I think before we continue we should have a coffee break. You seem so uptight!" With that she stood, walked around to Lyon's back and began massaging his shoulders. "You should learn to relax, you'd be a better worker, not that you're not good now."

"Sh-should I get some coffee, s--ma'am?"

"Who needs coffee?" she said stretching out on the couch next to her desk. "Coffee breaks are much better without coffee. Let's put Mr. Filbert out of our minds for a while, a nut's a nut, you know." She motioned Lyons over, crooking and straightening her index finger.

"You--you can say that again, sir."

Gloria "Gill-Neck" Wilson Filbert tried to console Fred's mother, "Everything's going to be fine, Mrs. Filbert. Everything happens for the best." Still, in the back of her mind, Gloria wondered what had caused her peaceful husband to go berserk. Was it the unusually hot summer sun that year or his unsympathetic wife? It could have been herself she admitted; she wasn't the most perfect wife in the world. Maybe it was his going out every day and not catching anything. Well, right then she had not time to ponder the question. The psychiatric center had called a few minutes earlier with news that Fred was requesting reading material from home. She had packed all his favorite books, including: Aesop's Fables, Treasure Island, The Three Musketeers, Tarzan of the Apes, King Kong, Mutiny on Board the H.M.S. Bounty, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, The Invisible Man and The Count of Monte Cristo. She thought it was a good sign that Fred wanted to read. Maybe his books would settle him back down to the quiet man she once knew. But still, how could he have murdered that nice young girl who looked so much like Cynthia Southern?

"Well," she thought, "the police are hard at work putting things together."

joe dansak

LEAVES

Wisps of emotion
like leaves on a river
touching my skin
causing me to shiver

a splash and she trembles
with happy laughing cries

I turn and she quiets
in her soft gentle eye
and her flesh tones
are mingled with
quiet
sweet sighs

We swim in the river
it's deep and clear
leaving at times
but always staying near

a.r.goldthwaite



DETONATION

Blast away the shells
leave them by the side
petals pushing out
blooming, pretty, wide

Watch a detonation harden
watch carnations in the garden
a violence supreme
has left only beauty seen

A pansy roars out color
hangs it in the air
this sudden shot of flower
has pleasure it can spare

An exploding piece of beauty
pops into my sight
pressured from the land
it grows green dynamite

a.r.goldthwaite

MOTIONLESS ROUTINE

The heavy factory door slams shut behind me as I walk out into the soul of the night. The bitter wind cuts me and forces me to walk fast for my car. Without hesitation, I grab my keys and open the car door. In a heartbeat, I throw myself in and shut out the outside world. For a fleeting moment every muscle in my tired body relaxes and melts into the soft contours of my seat. My mind is blank, empty of all thoughts and drained of all emotions, except for one, the desire to get some sleep. This body needs the sleep but not the soul; it never rests. Slowly, I shove the key into the slot and the car comes to life. As the car idles, something inside me makes my gut muscles go taut.

Something about tonight really depresses me. So I sit back and pull out my paycheck. My paychecks used to mean a lot to me but now I know the price it takes on my life. Those weekly paychecks come and go and trap you into a motionless routine. Only a few of us ever see beyond that treadmill.

I stash my paycheck in my coat pocket and turn the headlights on. Now, I am ready for the night, but I still feel the emptiness in my heart. To escape these burning feelings inside of me, I'll take my car and cut open the hard arteries of the dead asphalt body. Hopefully this freedom machine will carry me to the promised land.

Freedom machine and I, we're almost alike. We both like taking long rides to nowhere and we both have a fondness for the color of light blue. In fact, that's my destination tonight and every night, nowhere. With those thoughts itching to be released, I stomp on the gas and scream down the naked highway.

I used to believe in my promised land--a fantasy world where all my needs and wants would be met.

With throbbing pains in my lower back and gut-wrenching pains in my soul, I just don't care about it anymore. Elements of fatigue, loneliness, and motionless routine have taken the drive out of me. I guess I could feel different towards life if I had something to hold onto. Something I could be proud of, or someone, just to talk to.

But I just have my car.

It's the only thing I have that's worth anything.

I've got a '79 Chevy with a 305 under the hood. A small V-8 with a tilt wheel on the column. A classic part of the American dream.

All my friends already have a hold on their promised lands, but I am still searching. All the directional arrows point to hard work and using your head. Well, mister, I've been working real hard to get at my dreams. At night, I drive those dusty roads in Fitchburg, to work at the factory. Factory gives me a paycheck but takes my life and time. It takes my strength and leaves me fatigued. It puts you in a fast lane, but in truth you stand still. You breathe, you exist, you put all you've got to stake out a slice of the promised land. The billboards on the highway advertise how it's so easy to live like a king and drive a brand new Caddy. It all comes down to how fast you can run. The prizes for the winners are always shiny or new. Yes, everybody plays it, needs it, wants it and spends their whole life trying to get to their promised lands. But nothing is free: the promised land traps you and me to a life of paying taxes and paying tribute to Master Charge.

As time goes on, the promised land becomes a mirage. Only a handful ever get there, while most of us go from one exit to another

never reaching our promised lands. From the offices and factories across this land, people walk through their whole working lives with a fear in their eyes. In the search for the promised land we embrace the motionless routine of life.

On the open highway I can escape. I can breathe, but it always stares me in the face with one cruel reality. I always travel down this road, alone. Just one lonely driver, driving a five-passenger car, trying in vain to catch a glimpse of the promised land. The only thing I catch is a glimpse of a green billboard with white lettering. It tells me Fitchburg exit, next right. Too tired to think any more, I take the exit and head for home. Go home and sleep on it.

Within an hour, I walk away from my car and slip into the sleeping house. Before long I am ready to slumber off, but my body is too tense and my mind is still racing. So I lean back and let my thoughts travel back into time and capture the special occasions of my past. As I sort through the memories, last year's pilgrimage comes to mind. From the far distant corners of Middlesex County, five brave souls got together and attempted to climb Speckle Mountain while under the influence of Busch.

The long drive and the arduous hike up the mountain were quickly forgotten when we reached the final summit. The summit was barren, devoid of life and covered with freckles of gray and brown soil. Yet it seemed pure, refined to a point of being sterile. After finding the ideal campsite, we quenched our thirst and rested our rubbery legs. With teamwork we pitched our tents and prepared for the feast. Fresh fish from the Fryeburg Grocery and beer from the package store were on the menu that night. Before, during, and after the meal, we recalled all the best times in our lives. Seconds became minutes, minutes became passing hours. The pilgrimage reached its zenith around midnight. We became less sober and more insane as we journeyed through the land of free spirits. In this place, there were no rules or common sense, just go straight ahead and please yourself.

Victims of inebriation.

Castoffs from the sane world around us.

Together, on the mountain, we'll get stiff and shout obscenities into the night.

Before we all passed out, we gathered around and made a knock-out toast honoring the pilgrimage. Somehow I finished the drink of Barcardi rum and coke, and crawled off to my tent. Next morning I woke up to the sound of laughter and I quickly realized why; somehow in my drunken state I had torn down my tent and used that as my blanket. Throughout most of the morning, we packed our camping gear in quiet suffering. Just before leaving the site, one of the guys got the Polaroid out and snapped a few pictures for historical purposes. Trudging down the slippery moss covered trails and dehydrated by the sun, we struggled to reach the base of the mountain. From a clearing, a mirage came to life. The bubbling mountain stream was a welcome relief and we scampered over to it and sampled the enchanting refreshness of its water. Even now I can almost see and taste Speckle's mountain water.

There is nothing more refreshing in this world than to see a newborn mountain stream sliding down the mountain. The sunshine with

its fingers of light, touches the granite rocks and makes them appear gem-like. Immersed in the crystal clear water, the pebbles magically become ruby rocks and diamond stones. They all dance to a kaleidoscope of colors. The stream's constant churning and stumbling down the mountain reminds me of little kids playing a game of leap frog. Both the mountain stream and the little children play in the sunshine. Both are full of life and are always restless. Both are eager to jump over, slide around or just churn about.

Conceived by countless water drops, the stream matures and swells up, so that many patterns of life on the mountain can take shape and grow. The water from the stream is always sparkling clear, somehow, even while it splashes about and meanders down the mountain; it never loses its innocence. Sometimes the individual little streams are crocheted to form a larger cord of water. Even then, the bigger stream still retains its vigor and childlike energy. Every so often, the stream's mist jumps over the rocks and clicks its heels. The pilgrimage from start to finish, when it embraces the mountain lake, is like a small child, stumbling but determined to reach the waiting arms of his mother. Even when we go through this life, we can be like the mountain stream. We should be able to go through all obstacles but still have zest and retain a bit of child-like innocence. The memories slowly fade out.

A warm glow captures my thoughts, and then, a sudden smile breaks across my face. Warm memories and sharing the good times with close friends all but erases the motionless routine of life. True, I must have continuity in my life but every once in awhile I am going to have the courage to walk away from the motionless routine. I guess that's the gift of the mountain stream.

With that safely tucked away, I click the light switch off and roll over to get some sleep.

george waller



FOR JOANNE

"Joanne," the English professor began, "this paper is too flowery. You need to change..."

The conversation began that way. He lectured her on how she could improve her paper. She sat silently, listening, like a little hurt puppy, so proud of her prize accomplishment now being torn apart because of mistakes. I was no longer hearing the voices, only watching in gazed silence. For almost a year we have spent hours upon hours cramming for tests between bites in a crowded cafeteria. In the quietness of the library, where silence is the rule, we would hold back the playful laughter of two not-so-studious, would-be scholars, hiding their mischievousness.

Her deep brown eyes grow sad as she tilts her head to the side and rests it on her hand which is propped on the desk. He continues his lecture. She watches her visions of self accomplishment fade with each word of correction.

I remember the first time I ever saw her. It was the first class of the semester. I was sitting in my Speech class, listening intently with my fellow classmates, as the instructor laid out the requirements and expectations of the upcoming semester for the class. Suddenly the door in the rear of the classroom burst open and a young girl with her arms filled with books, huffed and puffed her way to the nearest available seat. "Off to a great start," I laughed to myself, "late for her first class." Her brown wind-blown hair was falling everywhere. The only effort she made to fix it was in blowing a gust of breath upwards, floating it out of her eyes. Then she smiled at the patient teacher, as if to say you can continue now; it was like nothing even happened.

In blue jeans and sweatshirt, chasing a Frisbee across the afternoon lawn, the little girl in love with life radiated her warmth for all those watching and laughing. A few hours later, the jeans have disappeared and the dress of her choice has transformed her into Cinderella of the evening, only her glass slippers and coach disappear with her moods, and not by the hands of the clock.

"Do you think you can handle the changes?" asked the professor, handing her back her paper. Then he moved on to another student, taking for granted her answer. The forlorn look on her face reflected the hurt within. "Oh well," her face frowned, "back to work." She paused briefly and gazed out the window. At first, she was probably just collecting her thoughts in order to redo the paper, but then her eyes seemed to fall relaxed, even content. Her Prince Charming has ridden into her mind and rescued her from the dragon. I wonder what he is like, her Prince Charming. Then the bell rings. Her heroic prince rides away, as we scoff up our books and head for the next class.

"Final exams start next," she reminded me. Whatever else she said after that must have just drifted by. Final exams meant the end of the semester and summer's entrance was at hand. The goodbyes would come too soon. This brown eyed girl had captivated me and I never realized it. At what point did she become more than just a classmate and friend? When exactly did this magic in her smile, in her face, in her eyes, in her laugh become my retreat? I have grown to depend on her, for within the moments of her voice I can

hide; and all the world and its problems just disappear.

"Well, what do you think?" she inquired.

"Huh...what?"

"You weren't even listing to me," she pouted, with that little girl chant.

Perhaps the summer will be kind and give her safely to the autumn when school begins again. Who knows, maybe my first day of class I'll be sitting, listening to the professor explain what she expects in the upcoming semester; and the door in the rear of the classroom will burst open and I'll see my brown eyed beauty, late again, of course. Then I'll smile.

j. michael hale

COMING HOME

The house was weathered beyond repair. The steps were broken and splintered, the porch broken and sagging in one corner. Windows had broken glass and shutters. The paint was chipped and faded in the waning summer light. At twilight a single light appeared in one window, its light making a small halo against a window.

Inside, a lone figure sat beside her candle. She was an old woman. Gray hair dominated her head. Her eyes barely opened. She was in a dark dress and a white sweater was around her shoulders. She sat in her rocking chair slowly swaying to and fro. The chair made a slight creaking sound that echoed throughout the empty abandoned house: the woman whispered under her breath "welcome home, welcome home, welcome home..." until her eyes were closed by sleep.

"Grandma, Grandma, wake up! wake up! we are here, we're here!" The woman looked up from her rocking chair. She saw her nephew, Tommy. He was hardly five. His eyes were bright blue, his hair as white as wax. He smiled and ran out the door. The woman got up slowly and walked to the door. She could see her son and his wife come up the steps. The woman let them into the house, then went to put the coffee pot on. Then she turned to her company and conversed until late into the night. She waved them goodbye and asked them to return soon. She went out on the porch and sat on the small swing. She slowly dropped her head and fell asleep.

"Ma! Ma! Wake up! It's time to play now! Wake up!"

"I'm awake," the woman said.

"Can I go play ball with Peter? He is going to play at Bobby Maddox's house and he asked me along. Can I go, Mom? Can I? Can I, Mom?" The woman got up from the swing. She was pregnant with her second child. She looked at her son. He was tall, but very thin. A doctor had said that he would gain weight as he got older. He was almost five but could not run as fast as the boys his own age. She was worried that he would not be a healthy boy.

"Yes," she said, you can go, but be very careful."

"O.K., Mom." The boy ran out. The woman went back to her

rocking chair inside. She decided to take a nap. She laid down her head and slept.

"Mother...Mother...he is leaving." The woman awoke. How could she be asleep now? Her son was going overseas. Her youngest son was going to fight in Vietnam and she was asleep. She ran out to the lawn. Her youngest son was in an Army uniform. Gathered around him were all the neighbors and relatives shaking his hand and wishing him luck. Beside him his older brother stood, trying to be cordial with the mob at his feet. Someone asked him why he didn't have on a uniform but was whisked away before he could get a reply. Later behind the house someone older would tell them that the doctors have said he was unfit for the Army.

When her older son got married less than a year later, she had said that the marriage would not last. The woman has tried to stop the wedding because she knew that his bride-to-be didn't want him but wanted her money. The wife has insisted that they live in another part of town.

Slowly the house had become run down and weathered. Her older son was too busy to visit. He said he would come by next weekend and mow the lawn or fix the porch swing. One weekend had led to another until she didn't call him any more. If she did she got his wife on the phone and the wife would tell her to mind her own business and leave them alone. Slowly she gave up hope and rocked in her chair most of the day. When her younger son had returned, she knew things would change. He would watch her and take care of her like sons should. The woman knew he was still fighting but she was sure he would live better because he was smart and could have gotten a job in the area but he was a dedicated soldier so had volunteered to go to the front.

One day a car drove up to the house. It was a green sedan. Inside there were two men in army uniforms. Cautiously, they walked up to the front door and knocked. She had seen them through the windows but waited a moment before answering the knock. The soldiers were very polite when introducing themselves so she had invited them in for coffee. They had refused but asked if they could come in and sit down. She led them to the parlor. They had sat down on the couch, she in her rocking chair. The soldier with the highest rank then told her of what her son had done. He had been very brave and won a medal. He had been killed while saving the lives of his buddies. She said that it made no difference what he had won if he was dead, and told the men in uniforms to get out of her house. They had given her the medal but she tried to give it back, telling them she wanted her son since her husband had been dead since the boy was born and she knew that he was going to be just like him. But they said it was God's will and put the medal on the table beside her. She said, "Get out, get out!" They had left and later her older son had come by when he heard the news but did not linger because he did not know what to say.

The years had passed and her son did not come home. She waited in the parlor with his medal still on the table. Sometimes she would hear someone in the house and ask if it was her son, but the people would say no and ask if she needed anything. She would say no and 'get out of my house'. The people leave and do not come back. The woman is still waiting for her son. She is still waiting to welcome him home.

dan mason



POEM IN SPRING

In green beginning,
Spring
Moves
Across the land
With wind-song,
Rain,
Lingering,
Warm Sun,
A season
Bright,
Illusive,
Lyric prophecy.

laura genovese

GENTLE MUSINGS

I never worry about the big
For there's no song sweeter than the
song a cricket sings to fill the night.
There's no tree taller than the one which
grew from a tiny seed
And there's no day brighter than the one
Which began with one red and silver
sliver of light
So i never worry about the big.

laura genovese

PUSSY WILLOW CLOUDS

Pussy willows' silver brushes
Paint clouds on a spring blue sky.
Maltese shadows, furrybillows
Roll roll and tumble swiftly by.

But when willows wash their brushes
In the rain to get them clean,
Magically, these silken brushes,
Turn to tiny leaves of green.

laura genovese

TRANSMUTATION

Withering leaves
Fall and rot
Becoming seed
To bud anew
Each spring.

Leaves, bright green
In sun's great heat
Bloom from gems
Filling boughs
Of shrubs and trees,
Through time
And seasons
Perennial herbs
Unnumbered live
Near rocks and cliffs.

laura genovese

NICE VICE

The best of women, and men too,
May sometimes say what isn't true.
A noble virtue, if designed
To keep from being too unkind.

laura genovese

SPRING

High in the rugged mountains
In the fastness of the snows
God works the alchemy of spring.
For a magic moment
The waters stir themselves
And take an ever quickening
Course down to the valley
Which opens its green eyelids
And lustily begins to sing.

laura genovese

AWAKENING

The Abenakis Indians first drifted down from the remote forests of northern Canada in the early 1800's. They quickly learned the amiable habits of the Connecticut River and its rich, fertile banks, following it southerly, slowly, for the next fifty years. Hence, they were a nomadic tribe, making and breaking camp at least once a year and, one time, when the Kind Winds came, they were forced to make the move four times.

And always they followed the mighty river south, scratching life from its sand and soul. It was during this year, when the King Winds came, and the Abenakis were forced to move further south for the fourth time, that Nick first set eyes on an Indian. It was a time that would live with him and that he would carry to his grave.

The tribe was despaired over the move again and this time moved further south than ever before settling in the northern valley of the mountain called Monadnoc. Here they found relief from the winds, and for the first time in weeks they made camp. The first thing they needed was food.

Nick had been in his tree since well before sunlight and the cold blackness of the new moon made him yearn for the first glimpses of the warming sun. It broke the horizon at his back and was the first part of him to realize it. From blackness to grayness the transition seemed slow as things came into focus. The brook which he had heard in the distance now came into sight. Birds everywhere welcomed the first rays of sunlight in celebration of the new day. This was the time he had been waiting for; it was the best time now. The winter had been one of the hardest and all the deer had moved deeply into the forests. Nick had come a long way, never hunting this area before, but the tracks, fresh in the snow, gave him confidence and hope. But what was about to happen would soon make him wish he had never seen the deer.

The Indian's arms were flexed, and the muscles twitched tightly, as his body worked in unison, holding back the powerful, cherrywood bow. The Indian had heard, and reacted, and now just had to see, and when he did, he knew he had won. The arrow flew flawlessly through the maze of spruce and pine, striking hard through the lungs and breaking inside. The deer's instincts took over. Never faltering, it spurted into a full gallop, not understanding what had happened, but realizing it was in grave danger and pain. It ran to the small river and began to wade, chest deep, in the freezing water, to stop the bleeding.

Nick had heard, and reacted, and now just had to see, and when he did he knew he had won. The lead ball flew, the force driving Nick back. And when the blue-white smoke cleared, the deer lay floating in the river, hung up on an extended log. It was the first deer he had ever shot in the new valley and the meat was already being cooked in a thousand different ways when he fished it out of the stream.

The deer was shot cleanly in the head and Nick was just about to insert his knife when he noticed the second wound. Never was he so confused. The wound was also fresh, but there had been no other shot. With a crack of a twig his questions were answered. The Indian looked like a giant, and for a moment Nick had never been more frightened. His gun was resting and unloaded. The Indian advanced.

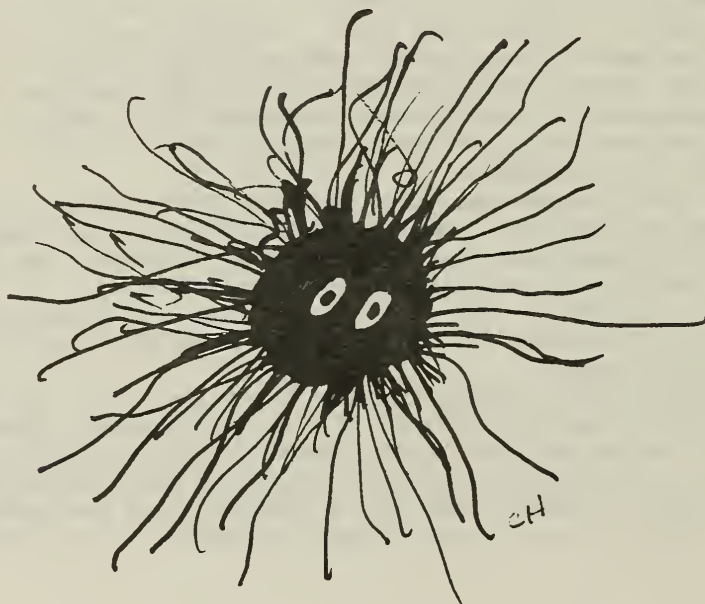
Nick stood up, the knife still in his hand. The Indian reached for his knife and Nick knew he was going to die. The Indian aimed half-hazardly, and thrust the knife into a dead log. His bow was without an arrow. He reached out his red arm. "Che-cum-seh," he uttered proudly. "Me, Che-cum-seh," slowly, deliberately.

The pounding left Nick's heart and the cold sweat warmed. It was a good voice. Nick grabbed the man's arm, and as each gripped the other's elbow, Nick replied, "Me Nick---Nick." The Indian motioned to the dead deer and they both knelt down beside it. The Indian motioned to the head wound and then to Nick and his gun. Then he dropped his hands to the deer's chest, to the other wound, and motioned to himself and his bow. What the Indian was telling him was hard to believe, and yet there lay the deer as proof. Nick nodded in agreement and took his knife and slit the deer's chest open, spilling the innards, steaming, into the snow. The stink hit him the same moment he spotted the blood matted, broken and feathered, half arrow.

Nick's eyes met Che-cum-seh's and both could see the ironic profoundness in the other's face. Nick knew there must be a solution but was uneasy as to what scheme this mighty man could have in mind. The Indian took a stick from the ground and showed it to Nick. Nick watched, puzzled. With a snap the stick broke and Nick was handed one piece. Che-cum-seh held his stick out and Nick did the same. Che-cum-seh drew his stick alongside Nick's and they were both the same size, exactly. Che-cum-seh took out his tomahawk and motioned to the sticks, and then to the deer. The message was absolute; and with expressed relief, they both smiled.

When the chore was done they washed the blood from their hands and knives in the cold water and tried to converse. But they mostly had to rely on sign language. The Indian knew little English and Nick knew nothing of whatever it was the Indian was speaking. But the lingo of the two men who wished to communicate worked, for in the months to come, they would meet one another many more times.

david dube



I am me.

Existence
is a thin

line

caught between
reason

and

reality.

A mass of contradictions,
my life balances
upon the silverfine edge
of optimistic imagination
and cold intellect,

Swaying
as experience
happens
upon experience.

Sanity/insanity

A delicate perspective

CLOUDED
by opinions
of a contradictory world.

Yet still --

I

am

Me.

veronica hradecky



A ONE ACT PLAY
(untitled as yet)

by
kevin casavoy

Characters
(as they appear)

The man, Harrison Prendergast
The woman, Ann Croteau
The 2nd man, Robert Davidson
The gentleman
The clown

Props: A door
3 comfortable chairs
2 end tables
2 flowers
a desk
a swivel chair
a file cabinet
1 drawer of files

Upstage center is the door. Downstage right are the three chairs, with the two end tables between them. The flowers are on the tables. Downstage left is the desk, with the chair. Stage left of the desk is the file cabinet.

SCENE 1

Scene: A room with three comfortable chairs (stage left); a desk and filing cabinet (stage right). There is a door upstage, center. In one chair sits a woman in her early to mid-thirties. In another chair sits a man in his forties. A second man walks in the door as the scene opens.

2nd Man: (staggering) Whew! Where in hell is this place at?
(To woman) How did I get here?

Woman: In response to your first question, your guess is as good as mine concerning where we are. About how you got here, well that's not for me to say.

2nd Man: Wow, I mean this is really strange. I really don't remember how I got here. What did you mean "It's not for you to say?"

Man Sitting: She means that it is up to you to figure out how you got here; it ain't any of the woman's business, nor mine.

2nd Man: Well, yeah, thanks for clearing that up. Hey, how about you giving me a little hint as to how I got here?

Man: The answer to your question is in the last thing you remember.

2nd Man: The last thing I remember, huh. Let's see...I can't remember...Whoa, hold on, now I remember. Yeah, I was driving home; it was late; I was alone. Wait a minute! A car! heading right for me. I felt a scream rising from my lungs--we were going to hit! (pause) I can't remember anything after that. And now I'm here. We must have hit. (looks at arms and legs) But I'm not hurt, or scarred. We had to hit. I mean that car was really cruising and so was I and, (scared look comes to his face), Hey, wait a minute. (looks to man and woman) Am I...Am I dead?

Woman: You got it!

Man: Fine bit of deductive reasoning or something. (stands up, walks around) Yes sir, you must have died in that car crash because you are among the dead here. I was poisoned. The bastards!

Woman: I fell off a ski lift.

2nd Man: This has got to be a dream or something. I can't be dead.

Woman: Oh, you're dead all right.

Man: You see, you wouldn't be here otherwise. Make no mistake about it, You are dead. And she is dead. And I am dead. We are dead.

2nd Man: How can you be sure?

Man: How can I be sure? Why a man ought to know if he's dead or not. Consider the fact that I have been here for four days and she for two. In that span, I have not eaten one thing and have had nothing to drink. On top of this, I do not

Man: need to. I am as strong as I was when I entered. So is she.

Woman: You see, so that's the only explanation. As a matter of fact, we have done more talking in this short conversation with you than we have done in the two days together. When you came, words came back. Yes, there is something important about your coming to...

2nd Man: Hey, enough of this; I'd like to know what's going on!

(A voice is heard saying "I'll tell you what is going on." They turn to the door and there is a well-dressed, handsome gentleman standing there.)

Gent: You three are here for a reason. You have been brought together here following the end of your respective lives to be evaluated and assigned to one of two places. Two of you will come with me; one will not.

2nd Man: And just where is that other one going?

Gent: Ah, but you should think of the first two.

2nd Man: So where are they going?

Gent: To a ...good place.

2nd Man: Heaven or hell?

Gent: Words, words, words; they only complicate things.

Woman: Why are we three in particular together? Have we something in common or something?

Gent: Yes, you do. You see, you all died the same way. That is why you are together.. You are sort of a team.

Man: Wait, this man died in a car crash, and I was murdered.

Woman: And I fell off a ski lift.

Man: Where is the connection?

Gent: Let me check you out. (He walks to filing cabinet, opens the first drawer and pulls out the first file.) Amazing filing system we have here. See, (holding up file) you three are right in the front. Now, let's see. Ah! Harrison Prendergast, murdered by his wife and best friend with poison cranberry sauce. Kind of funny sounding, don't you think? Miss Croteau, you said you fell off a ski lift. Oh, I think you have overlooked what caused the fall, as you call it. No, Miss Croteau, we have you down for the BIG S as we call it. Taking the law into your own hands. That is not favorable. And, Bob Davidson, you overlooked something, too. You had quite the buzz on when you were driving home that night. As a matter of fact, you were smashed. And that car didn't hit you; you hit it. So you see, you killed yourself just like Miss Croteau did. And you also killed one of the passengers of the vehicle. A five year old boy. Shame. So you are all murderers and/or murder-ees, that is where the connection is. Tomorrow, your lives will be thoroughly examined and two of you will be accepted.

Gent: One will not. You will sleep now, the hearing is to begin soon. When the decision has been made, all three of you will awake. (He goes to the door) Pleasant dreams.

Lights out.

SCENE 2

(Some time later. As the scene opens, a bell is heard ringing. The lights fade on and show the three in their seats asleep and a clown sitting at the desk, ringing the bell.)

Clown: (ringing the bell frantically) Let's go. Time to get up, sleepyheads. Wake up, wake up, wake up! (goes to the three chairs and weaves between them as they start to wake up) Hellow, Croteau-Ann. Need a light, Davidson-Robert? Feel like going to a fry Prendergast-Harry? Think it's hot in here folks? (he jumps on desk) Well, you ain't seen nothing yet!

Davidson: (jumping up) Who in hell are you anyway?

Clown: (laughing) Excellent sense of humor, Davidson. I salute you (he exaggerates a salute). But who am I. Surely you must know that. (he jumps down from desk, sits in chair and spins around in it) Weeee! I am all of you. I am none of you. (laughs) You are a part of me. I am a part of you. I've been with you always but I've never been with you. I am all that ever was and never will be (laughs harder). I was on that ski lift with Ann when she jumped off. I was at the table with Harry when he was poisoned by his loved ones. And yes, I was with you, Mr. Davidson, when you took your little cruise.

Harry: Have you come with the verdict?

Clown: The verdict. The verdict, my dear sir, was in a long time ago. Before any of you three were even born. Your lives were predetermined. This is just a part of the plan. You are just going through the motions. Yes sir, it is kind of silly but I don't make the rules.

Harry: Who does?

Clown: The Man.

Ann: The man we saw earlier?

Clown: Could be.

Ann: What do you mean 'could be.' Is he the man?

Clown: Questions, questions. This is not the time for questioning. Questions are for the living. Just words put together in such a way to demonstrate your ignorance. You cannot be ignorant now. You are no longer among the living. Now is the time for answers. Final answers, too.

Davidson: Let me ask you this. Are you here to take someone?

Clown: You're getting warm (laughs).

Davidson: Are you taking one of us...or two of us? (stands)

Clown: Now you're getting the idea. Yes, people, I am here for one of you. Not that you all shouldn't be coming with me. You all earned my company. You all should be coming to me. But I don't make...

Davidson: We know, you don't make the rules.

Clown: There is no justice, alas, (laughs) for all of you should be coming with me. You, for instance, pretty lady, deserve my splendid company, taking your own life over a man. Convinced yourself even in death that you fell. Ha, Ha, but you didn't fall. You don't even argue with me. You just can't argue THE BIG S up here. (aside to her) He was good though, wasn't he (laughs aloud). And how about good old Bob Davidson, great guy, liked by all, especially the lady down the lane. Too bad your wife found out and left you though. Life wasn't worth living was it? Drunk as you were, you still knew that you were in the left lane. You wanted that car to hit you...right up to the last second before it happened. And the poor little boy in the car you hit; he made it through in less than one hour, you know. That will have a big effect on your death you know. You killed two people, yourself and the boy. Miss Croteau only killed one person, herself. (laughs) Surely B. J. Davidson will go down fighting: you were the kind of guy that would cold cock me for saying this in life. Too bad you're dead now. Amazing how you can't argue, isn't it, Bob? (gets up)

Harry: Hey, but what about me? I was murdered, I didn't kill myself. How come I'm locked up and categorized with these two suicides?

Clown: (laughing hysterically) Harry...you don't understand. It ain't like you read about up here. This is the real thing, Harry old boy. Suicide isn't a ticket to ride with me! I'll tell you, it's looked down on quite a bit; but you know, there are extenuating circumstances a lot of times. A whole life is looked into. Suicide is about the same as murder because that's all it is.

Harry: I was poisoned. I was a cuckold, dammit. Isn't that worth something?

Clown: (erupts in laughter) Harry, you're great! If you could only hear yourself. You're a riot! So you had a cheating wife. You were a cheating husband, you know. That evens out. The rules aren't the same here. I'll tell you something else, too. You know that old thing about a woman being pure on the wedding night and the guy being whatever he wants? That's not so up here. That's a big one, too. That gentleman you saw yesterday is pretty--how shall I say--conservative, too.

Ann: You mean he is...?

Clown: Yep, that's him all right. He is the big boss. I think he fancies himself a lawyer or something. Not much on glamour. We have had our moments, let me tell you.

Harry: Hey, will you get back to me?

Clown: (laughing) Oh, Harry, we are gonna have so much fun, you and me. Oh, did I tell you that you're the one Harry? Oh yeah, you were my choice anyway. (sits)

Harry: But why me? I...I never...killed a man.

Clown: Not with the old hands, Harrison, but, oh, did you do some killing. Another thing about up here is you get penalized even for the ones you didn't kill literally. Killing a person's will to live and putting him out on the streets for the love of money is pretty close to killing him dead up here. Those people your kind sucked dry make it through pretty quick, you know. Not to worry, Harry, because you even killed a few literally. When you put out a contract on someone that contract expires when you die. You know why, Harry? I'll tell you why. Because contracts are made up of words, and up here...

Davidson: Words only complicate things. (sits)

Clown: How true, Robert, how true.

Harry: When do we leave?

Clown: Good to see you're anxious, Harry old kid! No, pal, we have to wait. The gentleman is very conservative as I said before. Heavily into protocol and the like. Everything is in threes up here so I'll be back tomorrow, on the third day. Then we'll be on our way, all five of us. But me and you, Harry, we're gonna have a hell of a time. (He exits out the door, laughing)

Lights Out

SCENE 3

(In the darkness, the bell is heard ringing. As the lights fade up, Harry is in the middle of a speech. He is standing on the desk. Bob and Ann are sitting in their chairs soberly, only half-paying attention to Harry.)

Harry: ...for what are words anyway? Mere sounds given meaning by mere people. I am saying words (rings bell) and these words are only acknowledging themselves (rings bells, laughs, jumps down from desk). If they only acknowledge themselves, they are wasted words and therefore (rings bell) are wasting time. (laughs) And time is of the essence. (sitting at desk) These files are words, these words are words but they are wasting time. No (laughs) they (rings bell) are wasting space. (stands on desk) He comes. (Enter the clown. He looks at Harry)

Clown: (laughing) Harry, old boy. You all set?

Harry: (jumps to floor, does a somersault, rises triumphantly)
I am ready!

Clown: (laughing, does a somersault) Well, all right, let's go.
Whoa! (he stops quickly as the gentleman enters) (The
gentleman walks in and the two stand silently. He
goes to the filing cabinet, pulls out the first file and
walks by the clown. After he passes the clown, the clown
mimics his proper walk.)

Gentleman: (without turning) Goodbye.

Clown: And away we go (Harry laughs. The clown runs past him
and out the door. As he leaves, he cries out...)
Let's go Harry, it's fun time. Yaaahoooooooo!

Harry: Yeeeeee-haaaa! (He runs out the door)

(The gentleman, oblivious to this is flipping through
the file. Finally he is finished. He closes the
file and puts it under his arm.)

Gentlemen: (to the two still standing) All set? All set.
(He walks away soberly. The two follow him out the
door)

Curtain



Last Day

It was about 4 a.m. when I leaped out of my bed to go hunting. It was one of the few mornings I didn't mind getting up early. It sure was a sloppy day to be going hunting, but I loved it just the same. The drops of rain were coming down so hard it looked like thin strands of wire stretched from the heavens. I thought that before I go stomping around out there in that stuff I should have a cup of coffee, and get a few things together. In the past years I took a few goodies with me, plus a jug of coffee to keep me bright eyed, and bushy tailed. I usually planned to spend the whole day. I stumbled out the door, "ass over teakettle," and kissed the ground. Little did I know that a patch of ice was just waiting for me to slip on it. After my three point landing in a mass of sheer slush, I stumbled to get to my feet. With rattled bones and stretched muscles I finally made it to the car. I paddled down the road, crawling toward my destination. I could hardly see the outer layer of glass on my windshield. It seemed to just puddle up and sit there. I thought once I had taken a detour, splashing through a lake. It was so difficult to see. There could have been fish swimming all around, and I wouldn't have known. It finally let up enough so I could at least squint to see the road. From what I had seen of it I didn't really like it. The way the wind was smacking the water around, it looked like white caps running out ahead. The water flowed so fast, had I shut the car off, I could have gone with the flow. I should have brought some paddles, and saved on gas. Each turn of the tires seemed like a big chore for the old car. Badly beaten by the snappy wind, and the violent outburst of rain, the old car and I slithered into our destination. Just a bit soggy here and there. Awkwardly I threw myself out of the car. With the rain pouring down like it was, it wouldn't take long for that three point landing to wear off.

Each step I took I could feel the sloshing in my boots. My clothes clung to me like glue. I trudged along into the woods, right smack into a pine limb. After I picked the pine needles out of my eyes, and mouth, I ambled along again. It wasn't long after that I got my feet tangled up in some grape vines, and fell flat on my face. I picked myself up, and staggered along in total shock. With one stone to fall over, which I did, I was brought right up to where I wanted to be, underneath that hemlock. I sat there in the wilderness resting my soggy, aching body. The cold silence of the woods surrounded me like a blanket. The cold needle-like morning air pricked at my face as I waited. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye I saw a flash. I turned slowly. My line of vision acted like a telescope making its way down between the trees. For a short moment I was bewildered as to what I had seen. It looked as if it was frozen in its tracks. It was so still, motionless, but yet still there, almost like a statue. The brush seemed to leap up from his feet as he stood there. The glistening flow of water running down the crevasses of the trees added a special touch to the foreground. The stillness of his stance shouted that something or someone was in the area. His ears rotated back and forth like radar antennas, expecting to pick up some sort of sound. I could almost feel them trembling as they moved. His cold, glassy eyes stared, waiting for some kind of movement. The black gleam of his nose shot towards the sky, trying to pick up the slightest scent. The agony of fear was building.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere came a great hissing sound, and thud!!He went over backwards as if hit by a bolt of lightning. Then a deep silence lay over the forest. Not even the slightest whisper of a breeze was heard. I sat for awhile, gazing at the four-point buck I had shot. At least five minutes went by when I decided he wasn't going to get up and run.

As far as I could see from eighty yards away, all he managed to do was to move one leg. I was getting pretty impatient. I eased myself into a standing position. Very slowly, and carefully, I inched my way toward him. With each step I took I could hear my heart pounding with excitement. I approached him cautiously, just to make sure I wasn't going to get gored to death. Just below the chin where I had hit him blood was gushing out. It was understandable why he didn't get up and run. I stood my gun against a tree, close enough so I could lay my hands on it if I needed to. I grabbed the rope I had brought, and tied two knots about three feet apart. One knot for each hind leg. The other end of the rope I slung over a tree limb. Straining every muscle in my body I hoisted him off the ground. I let him bleed for a while. I sat back on a stump and gulped a few cups of coffee while I waited. It was a great day after all. I sat there like a soggy sponge watching the blood trickle out.

About an hour had gone by when I finally got started dressing him. One slit down the belly, and I had his lunch sitting in front of me. From the looks of it he had a heavy one too. Scooping the goods out piece by piece I finally got him cleaned up. Cutting him down was the easiest part. The hard part was yet to come. I grabbed the twelve gage, single barrel shotgun in one hand, and two of his antlers in the other. With the long journey ahead of me, I trudged along, dragging him behind. Over logs, brush piles that seemed like mountains, deep gullies, around trees that would make a maze look sick, over stone walls that probably did some of the skinning for me, and finally onto the road. I stashed the big buck beside the road while I hobbled like an old man to fetch the car. It was about a hundred yards up the road, and I could keep an eye on the buck at the same time. I headed the old puddle jumper down the road where I had stashed the buck. By this time I was so exhausted it took every bit of strength I had to pile him in the car. Staggering around, I climbed in, and with a grin from ear to ear, I crept off toward home.

raymond c. matthews.

SARAH BURNHAP

I suppose the fact that it was almost midnight didn't help matters much....

Sarah had been seated in her dining area "needlepointing." That's what she called it, when she did it. When she stood up, she caught a glimpse of herself in the old carved-out Victorian mirror that concealed most of one wall. She got it at a barn sale. But that's beside the point. At the moment, she was giving some thought to her age. Sarah's thirty. "Not bad for thirty," was what she thought to be exact. She kept the blue jeans and sneakers tucked away inside herself, but the cost of living had risen to caution her, and her philosophy was not the same. Then again, it was always changing.

Sarah was something lasting.

She never committed herself to the color of her hair, "Not blonde; almost brown" was the description she consented to, and she kept it "tumbled." Also, she accepted her hazel eyes, Roman nose, and pointed chin. She'd never admit it, but the rest was left to a pale blue nightgown that plunged downward to the floor in one graceful flow... "One drink of water," she'd say.

Speaking of which, was not a bad idea. She took a glass out of her "standing cupboard," (the one she got on the same day as the mirror) and filled it past the brim. One sip later, she changed her mind and poured the rest down the sink. Then she lit a cigarette, Bette Davis style.

Out on the terrace, Sarah stretched out on the cot to cool herself down, and practice blowing smoke rings. She was pretty contented with her apartment; had it fixed just the way she wanted it, and a piano was finally on layaway. No "baby grand," "upright" was good enough for her, and its place was designated in her living area like an X that marked the spot. But the mirror bothered her. She'd say it was "ominous." I'll say. Anyway, it was originally hung in her dining area to reflect the copper pots and pans, wooden utensils, and needlepoint sayings that hung on the kitchen wall opposite. It was the "open book"; and friends agreed it was to the apartment's best advantage. The living area was also a sleeping area depending on which way the couch was made. Actually, all these areas ran together into one big room and not too much to fuss over. Sarah plainly hated housework. But she was not as simple as this external world made her out to be, although Sarah was simple to me.

Always, she'd be peeking inside herself to constantly keep herself informed of who she was. Just WHO she was, no one ever knew for sure because Sarah would keep herself stashed; involved in something or other..."little craftie projects" is what she would say. They were necessary after a day of keeping books at work. She hated figures, but did it anyway because she could think on matters of more importance while she banged away on her adding machine.

People gravitated toward Sarah; partly out of curiosity, and mostly because she could be trusted. I would say Sarah was inward bound. By the same token, this inwardness radiated outwardly almost to the point of benevolence, when it came to the ones she cared for. But she would never admit it. Sarah was not to be taken; something I'm particularly proud of. She was to be enjoyed.

When nobody phoned, and she was alone, she would perform in front of the mirror. She'd just pull some personality out of thin air, try it on, and keep herself company. Usually, she was after something undiscovered, or, some little detail about herself she might have overlooked. Therefore, she understood herself rather well.

The topic of "Sarah" occupied her mind, while she sat out on her terrace...which, by the way, was why she rented the apartment. Because of the terrace, that is, not the topic, of course. Well, maybe a little of both. See, she'd unwind on the terrace at night and give herself an examination. A personal one. I mean, she'd assess herself as a person and I hope I've made myself perfectly clear. Anyway, this topic, still unresolved, would have to wait till morning. Self discipline got her on her feet...only after a good night wink dearly departed from her to the moon. Sarah's a Cancer.

I, for one, was not surprised when she came indoors and instinctively sensed that she was not alone. After all, Sarah is a very preceptive lady. Since these sensations happened to her from time to time, she doubtfully hoped it was nothing at all. Again, she noticed herself in the mirror. "There I am," she thought, "all alone and doing a bang-up job of spooking myself out of my wits." Then Sarah did what she normally did, that is, what was normal for Sarah. She scolded her reflection out loud.

"Oh come on, Sarah, you can do better than that. Use your imagination and really terrorize yourself; you'd think you'd know better. I'm still waiting for you to grow up."

She paused at herself, and reassured her image.

"Really, Sarah, you're all by yourself."

"NOT QUITE"

Her body cracked to attention like a whip, and I almost jumped out of her skin. You'd think she'd just been bushwacked at the pass. We both silently screamed over what she saw. Somehow, he had managed to intrude, although this was not possible because, get this, the front door was locked, and he couldn't have entered the back way...she was just out there. Well, I suppose that's logical. "Surely," she reasoned, "I'm still out there, fast asleep." Seriously, she was petrified, and I felt sorry for her. He stood across the room, in place of her piano, quietly calm, and genuinely pleased that she should be in such a state.

"Who the hell are you?" was the best she could do.

He did not answer. Instead he stared intently at her with ebony eyes, and a grimace that said she would remember in a moment. He waited patiently, as if it was the proper thing to do.

Still paralyzed from tip to toe, Sarah scanned over her past as if her mind were a camera stuck on fast forward that would stop abruptly at one stilllife for a closer look, and upon rejection, would continue to reel at an alarming rate; one occupation I confess she was good at. She got a fix on a posture and the encounter that went with it. All the mental mechanics came to a halt, and her senses began to take over. Watch it. This combination of the senses, along with the tension that already had her strung up, and the memory of the incident, was lethal. I half expected her to pass out, but not Sarah. That's my girl.

I'll have to leave her standing there like an iceberg while I explain the incident to you. See, one night toward the end of

October, Sarah was out on her terrace when this extraordinarily evil one had passed through the yard. He stopped, said nothing as if he intended something, expressed the smile of a cynic, and walked the other way. Sarah almost died then and there. This certain aspect of his nature could not be ignored. I'll never forget...she thought that he was excluded from heaven's door because of some unforgivable mishap and whether or not he was sent back to haunt her was a big "maybe" in her mind. Sorry as I felt for Sarah, this made me chuckle inside.

I think it was about..., well, I'm not too good with dates, they're just not that important. 274 years ago to be exact. That's right. This is an old building she lives in. Sarah likes antiques. Anyway, 274 years ago there was an unforgivable mishap that occurred here, but of course, all was forgiven. It's hard for me to talk about it though. A man and a woman had a terrible falling out. This man was rather vicious, which is understandable considering his upbringing, and, well, he almost killed her. Fortunately the woman was like Sarah, in that she was not to be taken. She even had the opportunity when the tables turned to kill him. Instead, and believe me, she had the knife at his throat, she abruptly turned and hurled it at the wall; you guessed it, exactly where Sarah's mirror was not hung. The gent was so humiliated, he pushed her out of the way, ran out through the door and took the terrace with him. I would not want to tell a white lie, though. To be honest, he was EMASCULATED. He died 13 years later from the flu. The flu didn't kill him, he just didn't have the will to live. Incidentally, she wrote a book about it and lived to a splendid old age. End of report.

But not the end of this one. Let me explain. See, certain people, that is people like Sarah, are keenly receptive to people, and how they feel, and why they do what they do, and so on and so on. She makes "people" an interesting hobby. I keep trying to tell her she belongs in a guidance type position, working with kids or something along those lines, but I leave it up to her what she does with her life. Sixteen years from now she'll be doing it....Wait! What am I telling you this for? As I was saying, she's also receptive to events--past, present, and future. This is the only time in her life an event such as this one will ever happen to her, which made me stop and wonder why it ever happened at all. I guess quite simply, years ago when the falling-out occurred, a lot of emotional energy was discharged during this irrational encounter, within a very short space of time. Eleven minutes and twenty-two seconds to be precise. Even some of the attitudes between the two still linger. Essentially, the force is with us, and young man Sullivan is still trying to do his number on the woman--which is no joke.

Sarah, you whoo..., Honey, are you there? Oh, yes. She's still petrified with eight minutes and forty-eight seconds more to go. She just remembered that she chalked it up to supernatural something or other, and had gotten over it in time for the holiday rush. (Presents and all. Sarah was out buying like she could afford it.) At the moment, she wanted to declare war on herself for having let her guard down...

"Now you remember, don't you."

Immediately, she knew he could read her mind since he said it at the end of her thought. She's so smart it makes me proud. But

of course, this was one strike against her. Any plan she could possibly devise to escape this "destiny of damnation," (the terms she personally picked out) may as well be a "telegram" with an "exclamation" to "point" it out to him.

"Sad, but true".

He went and said it as if it was through no fault of his own. Can you imagine? He almost reminded her of a vampire. Sarah has this incredible imagination, in spite of the logic behind it. Even when she was a kid. I remember. She'd go to the flicks and watch Christopher Lee do his thing, come home..."Mommy, they bite peoples' necks and sip up all their blood"... and then wrap rosary beads around her neck before bed....Anyway, she wasn't about to stand for this "sad, but true" business. He actually seemed to be enjoying himself. Some maddening wave of outrage leaped up and crazed throughout her, very suddenly, and I looked around to see where it came from. If she had one of her wooden utensils in her hand, she would have charged thoughtlessly ahead, through no fault of her own, and stuck it to him. I'm sure we'd have had a rerun of 274 years ago, because it truly was against Sarah's better nature, also. Besides, the vampire bit complicated matters somewhat, and the one across the room played it to the hilt.... His expression changed, darkly grave, with eyes that narrowed in on her ruthlessly to the quick.

"How kind of you."

"I promised myself as a kid I'd keep a drawer full," she said, utterly serious just to spite him, and meaning, wooden stakes.

"Charming."

Contempt for her. That's what he was feeling and she could almost nail it down. Sarah's sharp as a tack. She figured that, at the very least, she could identify his feelings, and know where he was coming from. It suddenly occurred to her that this was why she had aged. To prepare for this little intrigue. Maybe so... because he was now highly agitated that she had contemplated doing him in.

Honestly, I could never blame Sarah for the state she was in. He stood dead straight ahead, not more than fifteen feet from her, if that, and looked like the Ace of Spades. He had on his formal attire; shirt, vest, pants, and an overcoat that admittedly was more of a cape. That was his style back then. Black hair sharply contrasted his pale complexion and chiseled features. Plus, brows of pen and eyes of ink made matters all the worse. One so intensely fickle by nature, she wondered why she ever let herself think of doing him in. "How vicious could he get?"

He smiled wryly to show her that she was correct in her thinking, and bowed slightly to remind her that he was at her service. Good Grief.

What was sad though, was to see Sarah now. Even her pale blue nightgown fell in static folds about her. Tension seemingly permeated her every part, like a spider's web of wire mesh strung tightly from every direction inside a fuse box of electrical impulses. It even got on my nerves. Obviously, she had to allow herself to relax. I managed to get through to her as I do now and then. She had this song she liked. "Slow down, you're moving too fast." Of course, it seemed absurd to her that some crazy song from yesteryear should pop into her head at a time like this...but, "Cute, Burnhap" was the mental response, and Sarah began to hold her own. This is

not to say she was ready to dance. She wasn't. Just the same, I have to give her credit. Then again, I always do.

She suddenly remembered what she had forgotten, and if you can believe it, it came to her something like this:

Something's gotta be keeping him there...the mirror! That's right...I'm standing beside the mirror! They always cower away when they come face to face with a mirror! They have no reflection! Oh ya, it's legendary...no brag, just fact..." And so, she concluded that she was safe so long as she stood in front of the mirror. This type of thinking is what kept Sarah young. She turned to find it, and I swear she would have wrapped it around herself if it had been still there. "The Mirror!" It was gone. She slapped her hands to the sides of her face, I guess for something to hold on to. "Oh now, isn't this getting bizarre..." There it was, the knife in the wall; a wall that was no longer hers. (The paper was changed.)

"What's that knife doing there?" she demanded.

"What knife?"

"That knife! The one in the wall!"

"Which wall?"

She was fed up and confused. She turned, and even pointed an accusing finger, but the knife was gone. Now the mirror was back. So, he must be gone. But he was still there, staring her in the face. What she really wanted to do was fall on the floor in fetal position, and sob. Correction. That's what she needed to do. But she would not give him that satisfaction. Instead, she got frantically irrational.

"I know you," she said, "at least I think I do. You must have been so evil, your very soul was rejected, and now you're demonic." Sarah was something to behold.

I hardly think I could describe myself better." (Pardon me, but he was just as insulting as spit; and his arrogance was making her sick.)

"What are you doing here?" she screamed.

"I came for you."

"What?"

"I said, I came for you."

"Look, you've got me all wrong! I'm not ready to go yet! I may be no saint, but I'm certainly no sinner. I can't believe this! What do you want from me? You must be here for some ungodly reason. That's it, isn't it. You know I have faith in myself and you wish to destroy it! I bet a buck I'm right. Something like that..." and she ranted and raved on and on, nervous energy, you know.

Sarah got the issue confused, sort of. Let me explain. See, years ago, Sullivan wanted the woman to marry him. But she was Catholic and he was faithless. Back then, folks made a big "to do" about this sort of thing. I guess she wanted a church wedding; he wanted no part of it. This didn't make her love die though; he was handsome back then when he had a little color in his face. But when she refused to marry him, he got wicked about it, and she finally woke up and saw him for what he really was. So, when he told Sarah he had come for her, he meant he wanted to marry her.

Although Sarah did bat Sullivan between the eyes when she brought up the religious issue, she certainly was not off base. He never did work the resentment out of himself, or the faith into himself, for that matter.

"You say you have faith. I say, prove it."

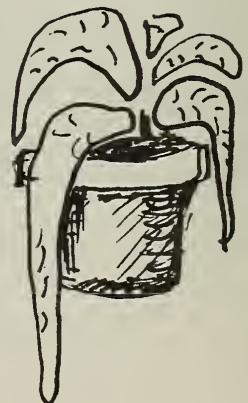
Bang. That's the way it hit Sarah. Undoubtedly, he was challenging her to demonstrate her so-called faith in herself. "What does he want me to do," she thought, "get down on my knees and pray? No, it couldn't be that simple..." and I suppose it wasn't. First, she consciously reasoned out that he must want her away from the mirror, or the knife. She never did make up her mind for sure whether he was a vampire or not. It's true he wanted her away from the knife, and he also wanted her to come with him... on his terms. Sarah decided it was better to run the risk of "approach" rather than cling to the mirror. Besides, "to stay," she reasoned, would show "weakness" and "disbelief in oneself" and leave her "vulnerable." At that point, she would be an easy mark, easily "taken." Those are the only English words that entered her mind; the rest was an understanding. Then, her conscious mind began spelling out..."No, No, No, No, No, Sarah! Stay here! Don't you care about Sarah?" This really irked me. All the times she was on the highway pushing seventy, when fifty-five would have gotten her there safer, her conscious mind sat back and said, "You know, driving is a lot like coloring. You have to stay within the lines." Just the same, she managed to make the move within what seemed to her to be a coliseum of archangels and demons. The closer she came, the more his face screamed danger. Exactly who's danger was in question here. She was almost within arms length, but being this close to him brought unbearable agony and intolerable fear. Naturally, I knew she was going to pass out, so I said it for her...

"GET OUT"

He vanished into thin air, and suddenly, Sarah was feeling "punchy."

In the kitchen, Sarah lit a cigarette Bette Davis style. The full realization of what happened had not hit her yet...so I wasn't about to leave her now.

j. lawrence



THE WALK

It was near the end of fall and the trees were burning with their last show of fire, as if they were trying to scare away the coming winter. The animals were scurrying about in the fashion of children on the last day of vacation, trying to get all the fun in at the last moment. Even my dog was preparing a new wardrobe for the cold. Nature was teasing. The sun was glowing hot in the morning sky while the air sent chills and the breeze whispered cool thoughts in my ear.

The trail was laid with a deep pile shag, cushioning every step I took. As I trod along this forgotten path I noticed the stonewall following me; this nearly indestructible creation of man that even nature couldn't destroy soon stopped, and found a place to sleep for the winter, while I had to walk on.

I soon came upon the brook and decided to set my carcass down for a spell. I couldn't take a drink; the brook looked like an open wound that never healed but just kept bleeding and bleeding. Soon footsteps could be heard coming down the trail. It was just the old farmer. He was dressed in hunters' red plaid and carried an old model 12 Winchester; must be the season.

"Seen anything?" I called, hoping to draw his attention from the ground at which he gazed so intensely.

"Hah, what, oh!" was his response. Just as I thought, never saw me, and probably would have shot me, thinking I was a white-tail. Damned old man will never learn that with age comes blindness.

"Seen anything," I repeated, hoping this time to get an answer.

"No, damned coydogs been spookin' the hell out of 'im," he answered coyly, (a good hunter never lets his fellow hunters know he's unaware of anything).

"Too bad," I replied with a grin.

"You seen anything?" he nonchalantly asked.

"Nope," I replied.

"Ah, well, I'd better get going' if I want to make it out of the woods before dusk," he said with a sportsman's attitude towards law and a farmer's need for cheap meat.

As he walked up the trail I noticed his clean white handkerchief hanging from his butt pocket. It sure did look like a tail.

He soon disappeared over the hill and I decided I'd better get home before dark too.

As I looked up I noticed the sun had disappeared and left a glowing red sky. The forest seems hollow with the lack of undergrowth and the absence of direct sunlight and I began to feel cold as the desolation of a comatose forest etched crawling, deathly thoughts in my mind. The feeling of being abandoned soon caught me and my stride became longer and my pace quicker. Darkness had arrived and I now had to pick my way through its silent world on my way back home. I rounded the last bend and could see the lights of my house through the tunnel of branches.

I could still feel the warmth of the fire in my mind, even though I had only left it that morning.

As I sank into my bed and sleep overtook me my mind became a battleground of abstract ideas. Morning was quite welcome as was the morning newspaper. News from an outside place would be quite welcome. As I gazed down at the paper I read the headlines--

"Farmer Gets Buck in Britches, Shot That is," and I laughed through my tears.

george bouse

GOODBYE BLUEJAY

I used to be a bird watcher,
Reluctantly I admit.
I'd choose a private nook
and sit and watch and sit.

With a spyglass and a notebook
And a snooper's probing eye,
I'd just keep on sitting there
And watch the birds go by.

And I found it quite amusing,
How silly birds can be,
Until I spied a bluejay
Hilariously watching me.

laura genovese

SILENCE

My room is silent
always deathly silent
but for the shudderings
of this dying house
and the soft noises of my pen.
So quietly I sit
deep in my bed, propped up
with pillows
I sit sometimes for hours
and look about my room
checking the balance
of each object
so lovingly placed.
It is so hard to explain
the gratification
each bit of me
that beams from here
or there
gives
so satisfying to stare at myself
making little changes.
The flowers on the shelf
stay alive
by sheer willpower
almost two weeks now;
I spray and water and coax
pulling off a wrinkled petal
here or there

and soon, maybe another week
when there are too many
wrinkled petals,
carefully, very carefully
I'll wrap them in wax paper
and hide them away
in a book.
There are so many books these days
filled with wrinkled petals,
brown leaves
and me.

rebecca cormier

